



PRESS RELEASE
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HEROIN SMUGGLER PLEADS GUILTY

Orlando, Florida - United States Attorney Paul I. Perez announced that late yesterday Maria Olivia Delgado, a 63 year old resident of Cali, Colombia, pled guilty to smuggling five pounds of heroin into the United States. The maximum penalty Delgado faces is life imprisonment, a \$4 million fine, not less than five years of supervised release, and a special assessment of \$100. Delgado will be sentenced on Wednesday, June 22, 2005, at 8:45 AM by the Honorable Judge Anne C. Conway.

According to the plea agreement, on January 23, 2005, DELGADO boarded a Copa Airlines flight in Cali, Colombia that flew from Cali to Panama, then to the Orlando International Airport (OIA). When she first boarded the aircraft in Cali, DELGADO had a soft-sided piece of carry-on luggage. When the flight landed at OIA, DELGADO took the luggage for inspection at Customs.

DELGADO was directed to a secondary inspection area where she was met by a Customs Border Protection Officer. DELGADO acknowledged to the Officer that the

luggage was hers and that she had packed it herself. After the Officer removed all items from inside the bag it appeared to have a false bottom. The luggage was taken to an X-ray machine, and an X-ray of the bag showed a second compartment and a dense object inside that compartment. The bag was further examined and a probe of the collapsible handle revealed a beige-colored powder inside the handle. The inside lining was pulled back and a false bottom was uncovered. The false bottom was made out of thin plastic, and it had been glued inside the bag. Underneath the false bottom agents found 2 bricks of beige-colored powder, wrapped in electrical tape. Field testing of the powder in the handle and in the bricks was positive for heroin. The total weight of the heroin removed from the luggage was 2.3 kilograms, or more than five pounds.

The case was investigated by Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE). The case was prosecuted by Assistant United States Attorney Bruce S. Ambrose.